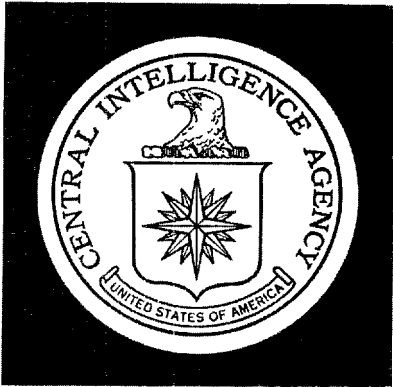


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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Eastern Nigeria on the Brink of Secession

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EASTERN NIGERIA ON THE BRINK OF SECESSION

The Eastern Region of Nigeria, under the leadership of its ambitious soldier-politician, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, has demanded virtually complete autonomy as its price for remaining within the united Nigeria. Ojukwu probably would prefer that solution, but the regime he governs has a sound economic base which enhances its chance of survival as an independent state, and his recent actions suggest that he is resigned to an eventual move to secede from the federation. He has been unable in more than six months of negotiations, to reach agreement on constitutional revisions with Lt. Col. Gowon, head of the federal military government, and foreign efforts to mediate have proved unsuccessful. Anticipating military action by Gowon's Northern-dominated regime, Ojukwu has imported arms and strengthened his army, and it would take only a slight miscalculation by either side to send the East over the brink.

Geographic and
Economic Background

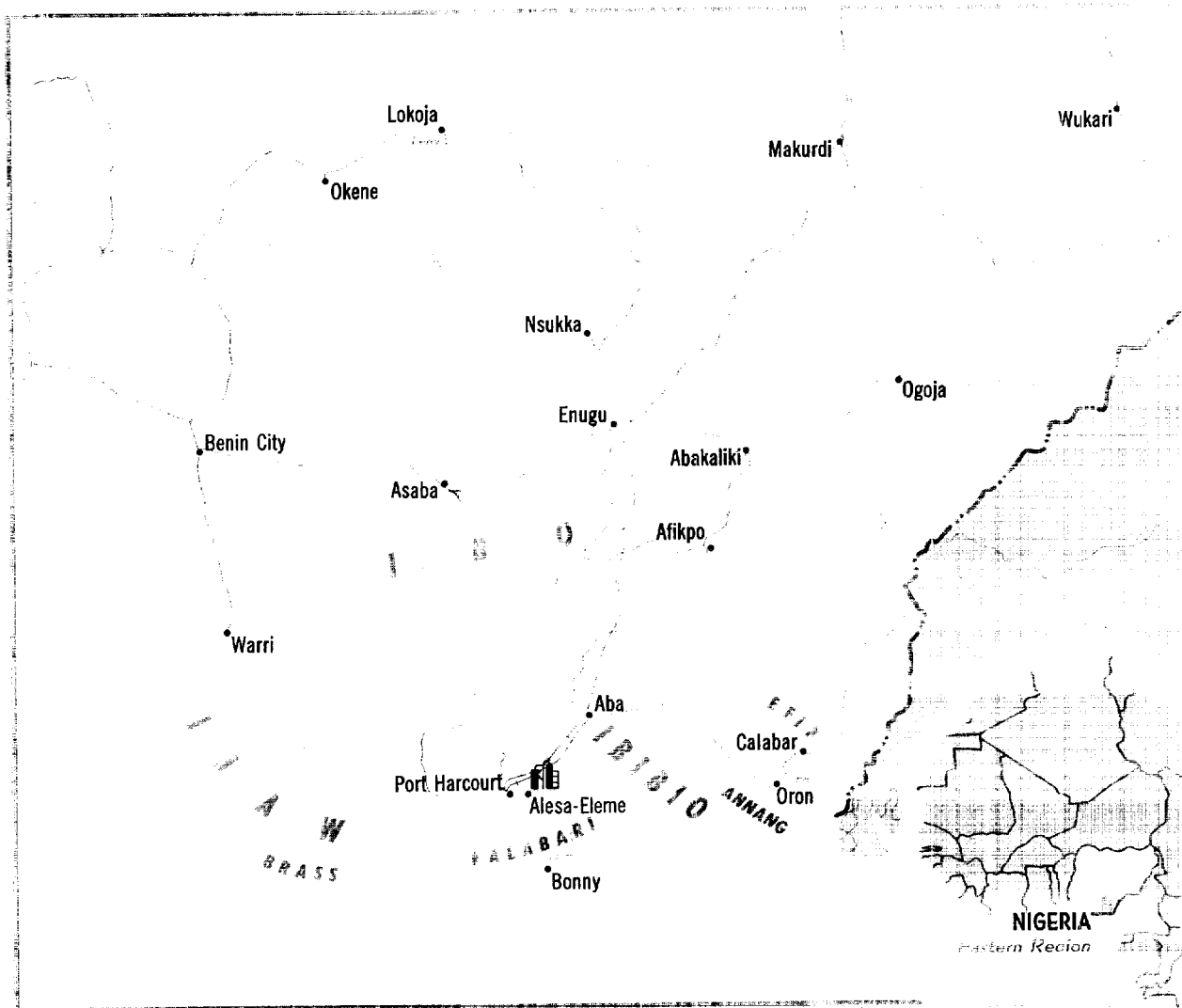
Ojukwu is military governor of a region which covers an area of about 30,000 square miles, just eight percent of the national territory. Within this fraction, however, live a quarter of Nigeria's 50 million people, making the Eastern Region one of the most densely settled parts of Africa. The aggressive and ambitious Ibo tribal group probably accounts for seven to eight million, or around 60 percent of the East's inhabitants; there is also a sizable Ibo population in the neighboring Mid-Western Region.

The Ibos and other peoples of the East were Christianized early in modern Nigerian history and received the benefits of

Western education through the missionaries and the British colonial system. As a result, the Easterners as a whole are much more advanced and receptive to modernizing influences than the Nigerians--more than half the population--in the vast Northern Region, where Muslim traditionalism has long predominated. This advantage enabled the Easterners, who years ago began migrating to the North in large numbers because of population pressures at home, to garner most of the better jobs in government and commerce in that area.

Economically the East has a good balance of agricultural and mineral resources and a comparatively well-developed infrastructure of services and

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Nigeria's Eastern Region

- Region boundary
 - ANNANG Tribal group
 - Oil refinery
 - Area of oil producing wells
- 0 STATUTE MILES 100

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facilities. Oil now is the chief export and source of government revenue, but palm products remain important and rubber output is climbing. About a fifth of Nigeria's manufacturing capacity is in the East and the range of products is wide for an under-developed area. With West Africa's only commercial coal mines, ample water supplies, and a major ocean port, the region has good possibilities for economic growth.

The East, however, has its own minorities problem. Its oil fields lie almost exclusively within territory inhabited by non-Ibo tribes which for many years have agitated for greater autonomy, if not outright separation, from Ibo domination. The principal minority groups are the Ijaw, which includes the Brass and Kalabari tribes, the Ibibios, and Annangs, and the Efiks. Most of these minorities live along the coast and northward along the border with Cameroon. All dislike the Ibos, but otherwise have little else in common.

Political Background

Under its long-time political leader, Nnamdi Azikiwe, who eventually became president of Nigeria, the East in the 1940s and 1950s played a pre-eminent role in promoting the cause of Nigerian nationalism and independence. When Britain handed over sovereignty in 1960, the Ibos' political arm was the junior partner of the North's in the national government coalition. The liaison was always an

uneasy one, however, because of the deep-seated religious, social, and cultural differences dividing the individualistic, progressive Easterners and the aristocratic Muslim rulers of the feudal North.

The political marriage of North and East steadily deteriorated as the dominant Northerners seized every opportunity to strengthen their grip on the delicately balanced federal mechanism bequeathed by the British. Key developments were a controversial national census enabling the North to retain its majority allotment of seats in the federal parliament, the extension of Northern influence in the Western Region through an alliance with a minority Yoruba tribal faction there, and the manipulated victory of these allies in the federal general election of 1964. After this election, which itself almost triggered the eventual showdown between North and East, the East's role in the federal administration was cut back sharply. The following year, when the Northerners backed their Western ally in a grossly fraudulent regional election, the Easterners were convinced that the North was bent on extending its domination to the Eastern Region itself, and secessionist sentiment gained momentum.

The January 1966 Coup

Such was the situation in January 1966 when a group of young, idealistic, predominantly

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Ibo army officers, motivated also by disgust with the corruption in the national and regional governments, overthrew the constitutional regime. In the process they assassinated a number of the country's top political and military leaders. The commander of the army, Maj. Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Ibo, quickly took control and organized a southern-based military regime which relied essentially on Ibo strength in the federal military and civil services. Following the Ibo tradition of support for a strong central government, Ironsi began by decree to erode the autonomy of the regions, ending by unifying the regional and federal civil services and abolishing the federal structure.

Now the tables were reversed and the Northerners had cause to fear Ibo domination. Such was the panic in May 1966 that brought on the ten-day mass slaughter of Ibos by civilian mobs in the North. Two months later, mutinous Northern military elements murdered Ironsi and installed Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, a Christian Northerner, as head of the federal military government. This second coup touched off a new vendetta against Ibos which culminated in late September in another wave of anti-Ibo mob violence throughout the North. All told, thousands of Ibos were killed, and approximately a million of them fled back to the Eastern Region.

While Gowon's take-over brought to power in Northern Nigeria a younger, generally more progressive leadership and started

a gradual demise of the old Hausa-Fulani feudal system, this does not necessarily portend better days for the Eastern Ibos, because the Hausa-Fulani are still deeply involved in the present regime, and the Northern minority groups represented by Gowon also hate the Ibos. The Ibos have concluded that it is no longer possible to live or work in the North or anywhere else outside the East as long as Northerners dominate the federal government. Consequently, Lt. Col. Ojukwu has declared that Nigeria must alter its governmental structure in favor of greatly increased regional autonomy or face the possibility of Eastern secession.

Government in the East

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, just 32 years old, was appointed military governor of the Eastern Region by Ironsi in January 1966. During the year he has been in control, Ojukwu, an astute politician, has won the support of most Ibos, including the army units in the East. To quiet minority agitation and to initiate new representative institutions in the East, Ojukwu created a consultative body with fairly broad representation and increased the number of provinces from 13 to 20. He has given the provinces primary responsibility for a number of governmental, social, and economic functions, with the regional government serving as adviser and coordinator. There is some question, however, whether the provinces

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will actually be allowed to exercise their assigned responsibilities with any degree of independence. Ojukwu has also issued an edict giving him broad powers to maintain law and order throughout the region.

Resettlement of the one million Ibo refugees--a population increment of about eight percent in the space of six months--is a serious problem for Ojukwu's government. Many of these are skilled administrators and technicians who readily found jobs in industry or the government--reports indicate that some government agencies have never been operating so efficiently. It will, however, take a long time and a



Lt. Col. Ojukwu

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lot of money to absorb all the refugees into the Eastern economy. The need for money has focused Ojukwu's attention on the allocation of federal revenues to the regions, and he has declared that considerably more of the revenues which originate in the East should be returned there. Most revenues are collected by federal agents and remitted to Lagos, which then reallocates them according to a complicated formula. The East directly collects only about a third of its current budget requirements, and gets about 30 percent of the federal allocation to the regions.

The Pre-eminence of Oil

Shell-BP, the principal producer of oil in Nigeria, has been operating in the Eastern Region since 1937 and was the sole producer through 1964. Oil production averaged about 560,000 barrels in January 1967, including the rapidly expanding production in the Mid-Western Region. Total federal revenues in 1966 from oil operations in the East amounted to about \$45 million, of which the Eastern Region received about \$15 million, or almost 20 percent of Eastern revenues. About 90 percent of all oil produced in Nigeria moves through the oil terminal at Bonny, south of Port Harcourt, which is the location of the country's only petroleum refinery.

Assuming rapidly increasing importance in the oil picture are the profits taxes, which are paid directly to the

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federal government and in which the regional governments do not share. It is estimated that profits taxes paid in 1966 may amount to nearly \$30 million and jump to about \$70 million in 1967. Since a substantial portion of these profits taxes are generated from oil production in the Eastern Region, Eastern assumption of control would add a great deal more revenue from oil than is now being received. This assumption probably would more than make up for the loss of the Eastern share of revenues collected outside the East.

Progression of Eastern Autonomy

Ever since the overthrow of Ironsi last July, Ojukwu has consistently and formally declined to accept Gowon as head of the federal military government. Moreover, Ojukwu has refused to attend meetings of the top-level Supreme Military Council (SMC) except for the meeting held in Ghana last January. Eastern spokesmen have participated in several other meetings of regional representatives since September 1966 to discuss various aspects of governmental and military organization. Each time, however, the Easterners' advocacy of vastly greater regional autonomy has brought them into sharp conflict with the other representatives, especially those from the North, and with the federal government. Although considerable agreement was reached concerning constitutional revision at two of these meetings held since the Ghana conference, the

implementing draft decrees circulated by Lagos have been rejected by Ojukwu. He has seemed bent on extracting the maximum advantage from the Ghana agreements which, in fact, conceded much to the confederal principles Ojukwu has consistently espoused since last August.

Ojukwu has already largely put into effect the decision made at the Ghana SMC meeting regarding greater regionalization of the army. In fact, he has apparently gone considerably beyond what was actually agreed to. The 1st Battalion in Enugu--officially still subordinate to the 2nd Brigade in Lagos--together with Ibo army personnel who fled from other regions, has been reorganized into a new brigade structure that is acting independently of directives from Lagos, although formal ties are still maintained. Estimates of army strength in the East range up to 4,000 in four battalions, and supporting units of the new "Eastern command" have definitely been located at Nsukka, close to the border with the Northern Region,

Other breakaway moves by the East have included withdrawal from the national social

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security system and the reported severance by labor unions, students, lawyers, and journalists of connections with their respective national organizations. Ojukwu is attempting to set up an international telecommunications capability by purchasing equipment abroad, and he has tried to encourage foreign investors by making it easier to deal directly with Enugu rather than going through Lagos. The East has purchased a US-made executive jet aircraft and a number of French Allouette helicopters.

Eastern Economic Initiatives

For months now, Ojukwu's regime has been engaged in economic warfare against the North, partly as a preventive measure and partly as a means of inducing an accommodation to Eastern constitutional demands. Rail traffic with the North, cut back to a trickle last fall, has been stopped entirely since 1 January and an embargo has been placed on all trade with the North, as well as on the export of foodstuffs to other regions. Although some smuggling probably is taking place, the embargo is believed to be quite effective. Ojukwu has also held up Northern export commodities already in Port Harcourt for overseas shipment.

The East is holding perhaps one third of the country's

railroad rolling stock, including a substantial number of fuel tank cars. This has hampered the effort to supply refined petroleum products to the North via the rail line from Lagos. Shortages of gasoline and diesel fuel are currently reported from all over the Northern Region, which previously relied almost exclusively for its POL supplies on the railroad from Port Harcourt. The North also obtained its coal imports from the mines around Enugu. On the other hand, the East no longer can import meat and other foods from the North, but there has been little evidence of serious food shortages in the East.

Outlook

Whether Ojukwu finally opts for complete independence would appear to depend on the actions taken in the next few weeks by Gowon and the Northern-controlled federal government. Ojukwu long ago laid down his conditions for remaining a part of Nigeria: a looser federal structure and greater regional autonomy, both political and financial. Last month he served notice that he will start assuming such authority after the end of Nigeria's fiscal year on 31 March if no agreement has been reached. If Gowon or others attempt to force him to knuckle under to federal control, Ojukwu may go the whole way.

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Some of Ojukwu's recent statements and actions in his duel with Gowon appear deliberately aimed at provoking a federal reaction which would provide a plausible pretext for Eastern secession. In thus courting a possible military move against the East--a course long pressed on Gowon by Northern hard-liners--Ojukwu now seems confident, and probably justifiably so--that his own forces could at least hold their own. He may also have reason to believe that such a federal move would prompt the Western Region's Yorubas, increasingly restive over the continued presence in the West of "oc-

cupying" Northern soldiers, to make common cause with the East in a move to drive the Northerners back to their homeland.

Mindful of the ill-fated bid for independence by Congo's Katanga Province, Ojukwu has already moved in various ways--including engaging a US public relations firm--to build sympathy abroad. At home, where he appears master of both the Ibos and the minorities, he is currently going all out to whip up emotional support for his regime and to prepare his people for any eventuality.

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